

SUCCESS STORIES

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Exchange celebrates the creativity of early childhood programs in creating solutions to everyday challenges. We invite you to share your ideas with the readers of *Exchange* magazine.

We are looking for all sorts of ideas, both big and small. It could be a technique you use for training staff, a fundraising idea, a fee collections tip, a public relations idea, a financial management tool, a program evaluation approach, a paperwork organization method, or anything that makes your program work better.

Go to www.ChildCareExchange.com and click on "Success Stories." Identify the challenge or problem you faced; your solution to this problem; and some details about this solution so others might follow in your footsteps. Be specific! Thank you for your willingness to share your innovations with *Exchange* readers! Read on to learn about three real life success stories.



Nancy Kaczrowski, ERF, Savage, Minnesota

As we are gearing up for new children to enter the classrooms in the fall, I remind staff to make the environment safe for all children and their parents. To do so I use the "stop/go" light with a black piece of construction paper and red, yellow, and green circles glued on to fashion the stop/go light. I then challenge staff to think of what makes their environment "red," "yellow," or "green." A "red" environment can be unsafe physically, for example walking alone in the dark, the first person to arrive, or the last person to leave the workplace; it can also be unsafe emotionally, such as joining an unfamiliar group (i.e., attending a workshop) or being in a setting where a different language is spoken, or the "rules" are not apparent. A "yellow" environment is safe only some of the time, while a "green" environment is safe all the time. This hands-on learning activity has been very beneficial for all staff to think of room arrangement, rules, and messages — both verbal and non-verbal — that children and families receive.

Claude Endfield, Northland Pioneer College, Holbrook, Arizona

One of the most successful activities I organized, while a Head Start Director for a program serving over 200 children, was to organize a "switch day." Some of the classroom staff complained that they didn't think the office staff and coordinators did "anything." So with about a month's planning, the office staff and coordinators moved into the classrooms for one morning while the teachers became the administrators. What a glorious day it was! One of the loudest protestors stated during our discussion meeting after the morning, "I will never complain about _____ again. She has to wear roller skates

to be able to keep up with her job." Another teacher who had decided to take on the director's role was overwhelmed with all of the administrative "stuff" that had been left for him to do. And the administrative staff loved being able to be in charge of a classroom, even if for just a morning. Most of the administrators had been classroom staff who had moved up the career ladder. By the end of the class day, the new "administrators" were standing by the classroom doors clamoring for our attention to respond to "crises" that had come up. One of them expressed, "We thought you never would come out of the classroom." Twenty years later, some of the staff still talk about that day as a wonderful learning experience.

Susan Twombly, Infant Toddler Children's Center, Acton, Massachusetts

We have been trying to make our monthly staff training sessions more interactive and practical. At one staff meeting we shared some criteria for creating areas in the room for provoking children's interest and sense of wonder. Prior to the meeting some of our program coordinators had assembled collections of interesting objects, fabric, and pictures. We chose collections that could be manipulated by the children. Children could assort piles of rocks, for example, in various ways — by color, design, numerically, and so on. The idea is to let them give order to the world. Children seem to be drawn to that. Other collections of objects included playing cards, driftwood

pieces, and jars. Teams were then challenged to transform a corner of their room into a place of wonder. About half an hour before the end of the training session, each teaching team visited one other classroom. We had made up a critique sheet which teams used to leave comments and suggestions about the area of the room that had been transformed.

The next day energy and curiosity were high as teachers asked each other how the children had reacted to the newly arranged materials. Because other teams had visited other classrooms, the conversations were rich and specific — everyone cared about the other's work.

